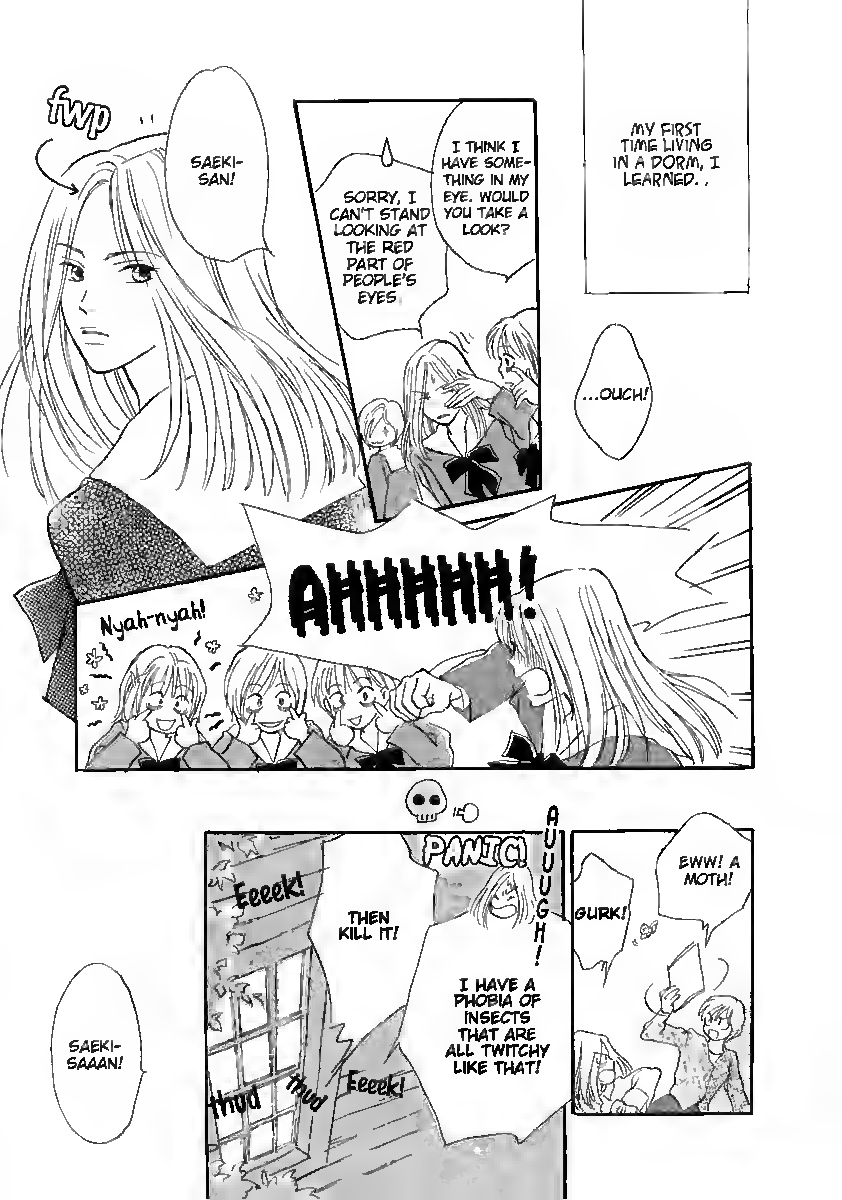
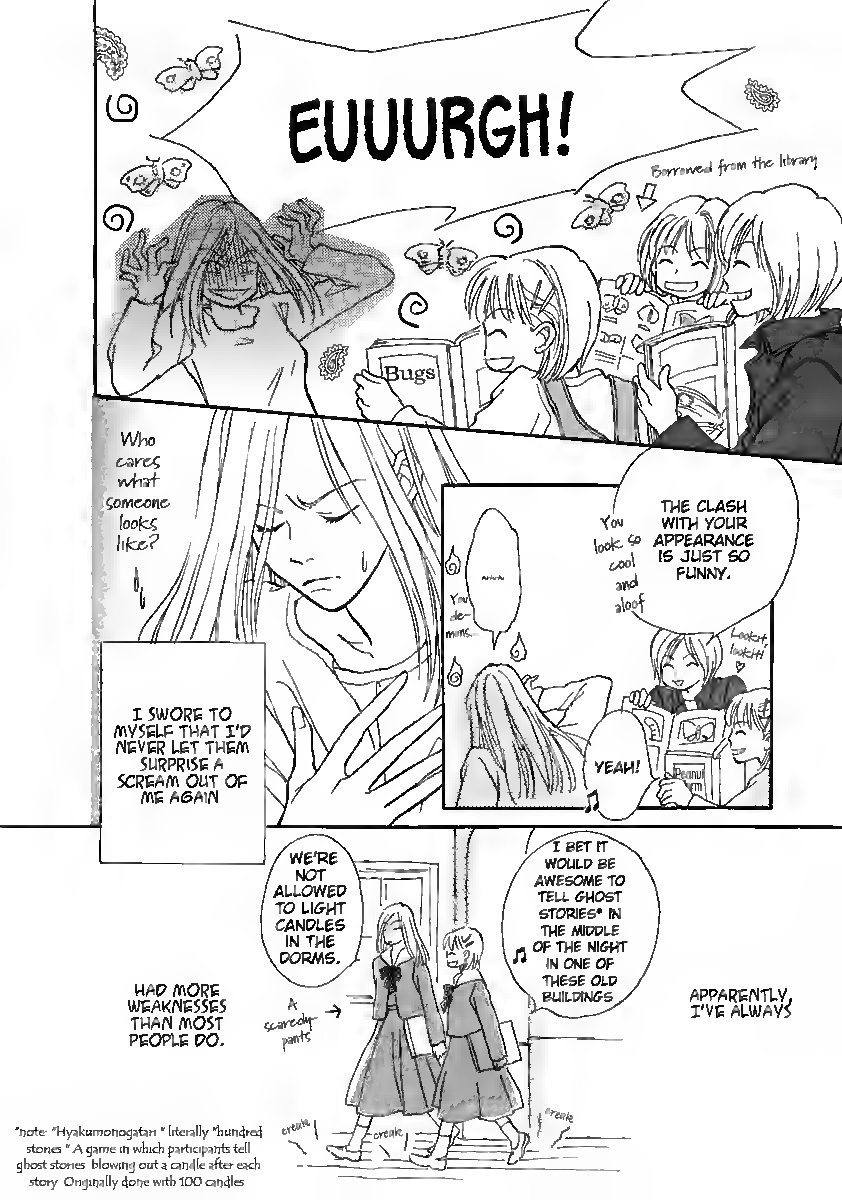

MY FIRST TIME LIVING IN A DORM, I LEARNED...
...OUCH!
I THINK I HAVE SOMETHING IN MY EYE. WOULD YOU TAKE A LOOK?
SORRY, I CAN'T STAND LOOKING AT THE RED PART OF PEOPLE'S EYES.
fwp
SAEKI-SAN!
AHHHHH!
Nyah-nyah!
AUUUGH!
PANIC!
Eeeek!
THEN KILL IT!
I HAVE A PHOBIA OF INSECTS THAT ARE ALL TWITCHY LIKE THAT!
thud
thud
Eeeek!
SAEKI-SAAAN!
EWW! A MOTH!
GURK!


EUUURGH!
Borrowed from the library
Bugs
Who cares what someone looks like?
I SWORE TO MYSELF THAT I'D NEVER LET THEM SURPRISE A SCREAM OUT OF ME AGAIN
THE CLASH WITH YOUR APPEARANCE IS JUST SO FUNNY.
You look so cool and aloof
Ahhhh
You dermms.
Lookit lookit!
YEAH!
Permut m
HAD MORE WEAKNESSES THAN MOST PEOPLE DO.
WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO LIGHT CANDLES IN THE DORMS.
A scaredy pants
I BET IT WOULD BE AWESOME TO TELL GHOST STORIES* IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT IN ONE OF THESE OLD BUILDINGS
APPARENTLY, I'VE ALWAYS
creak
creak
creak

*note: "Hyakumonogatari" literally "hundred stories." A game in which participants tell ghost stories blowing out a candle after each story. Originally done with 100 candles

THE INVISIBLE.
THE INEXPLICABLE.

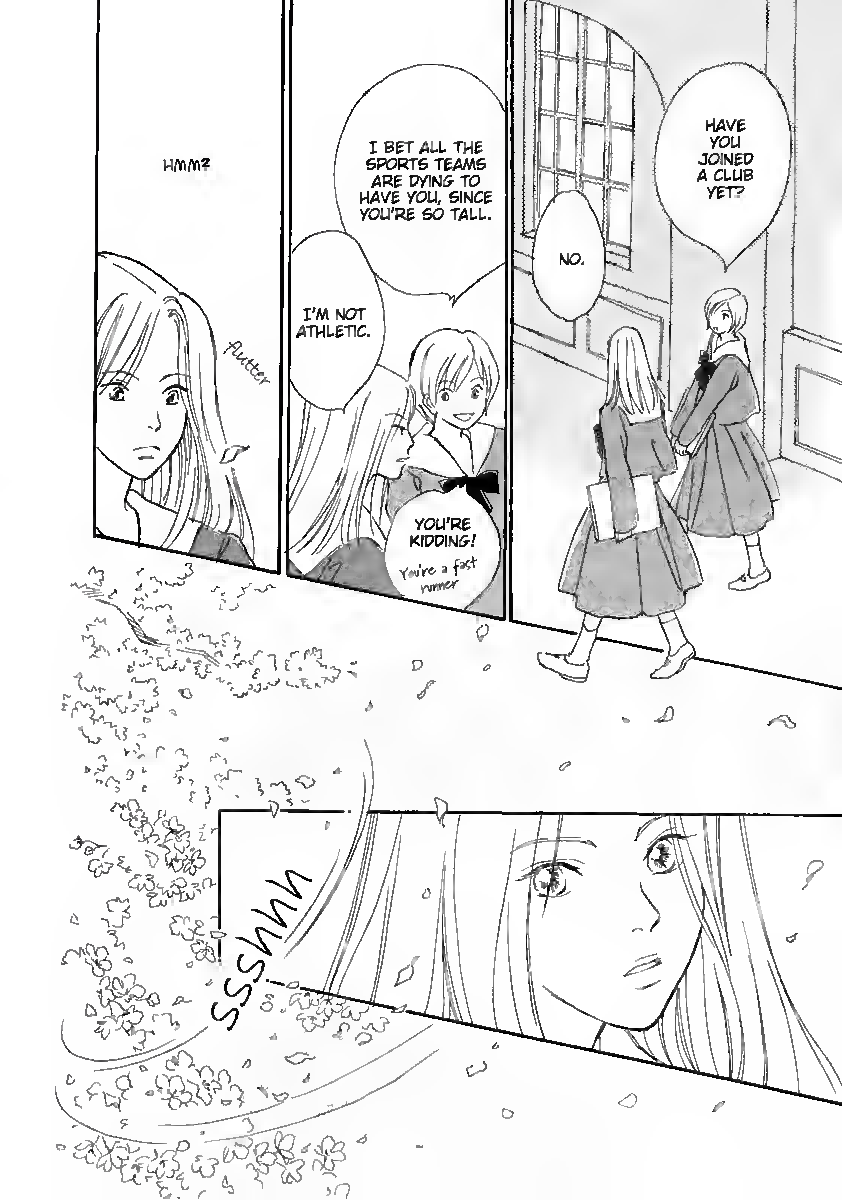
THE STRANGE AND THE MYSTERIOUS.

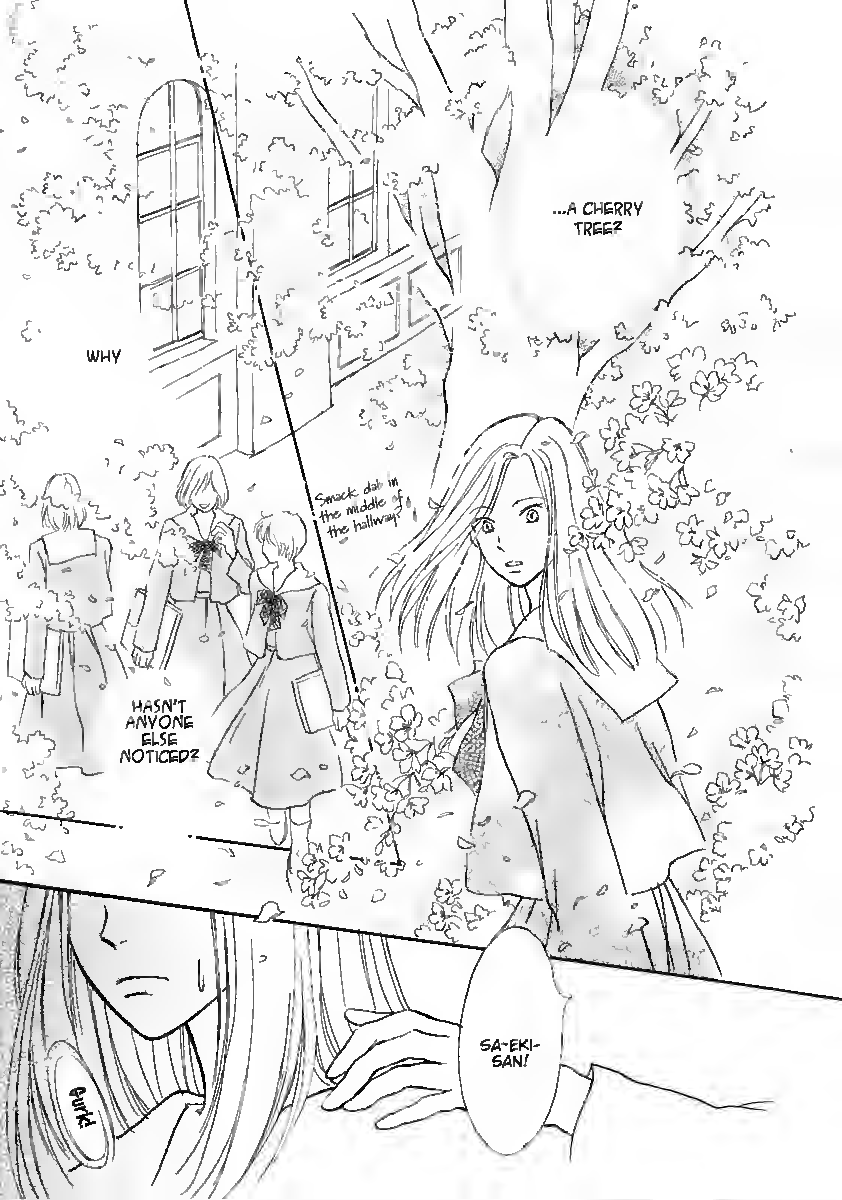
The Secret Dormitory

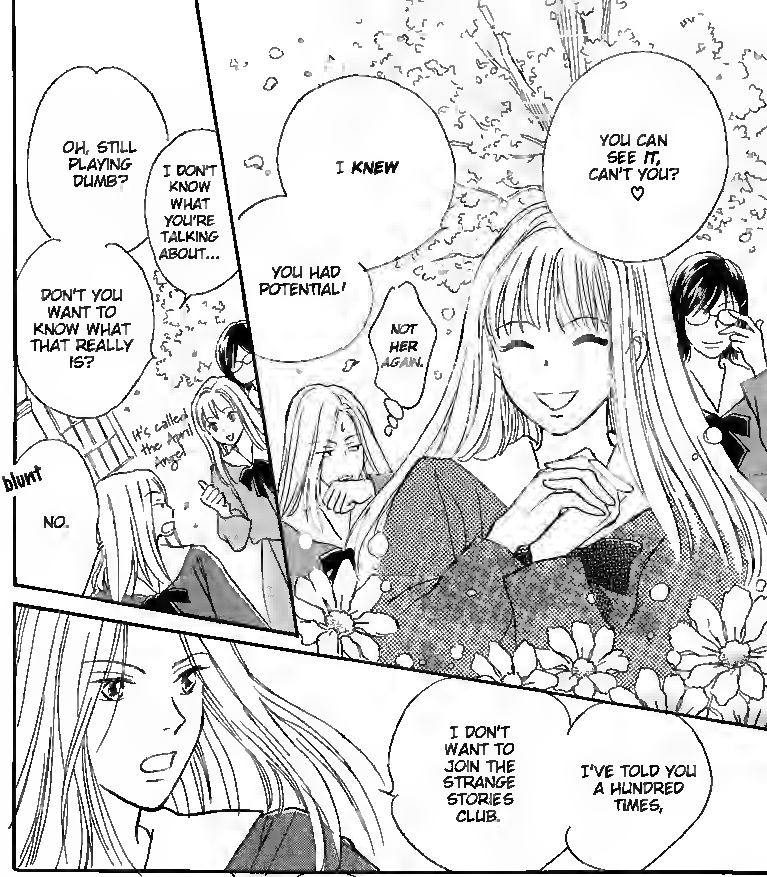
Visiting Paradise

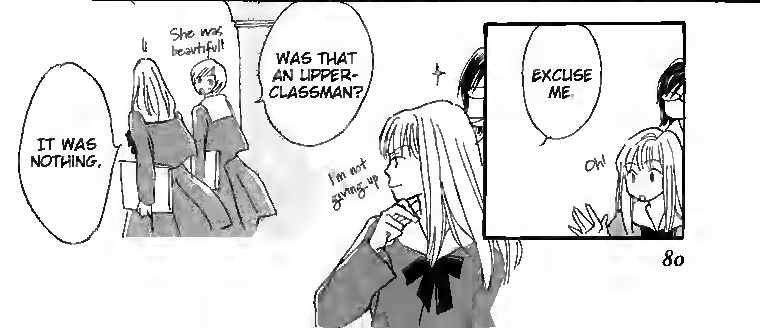
SO GHOST STORIES ARE COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION..

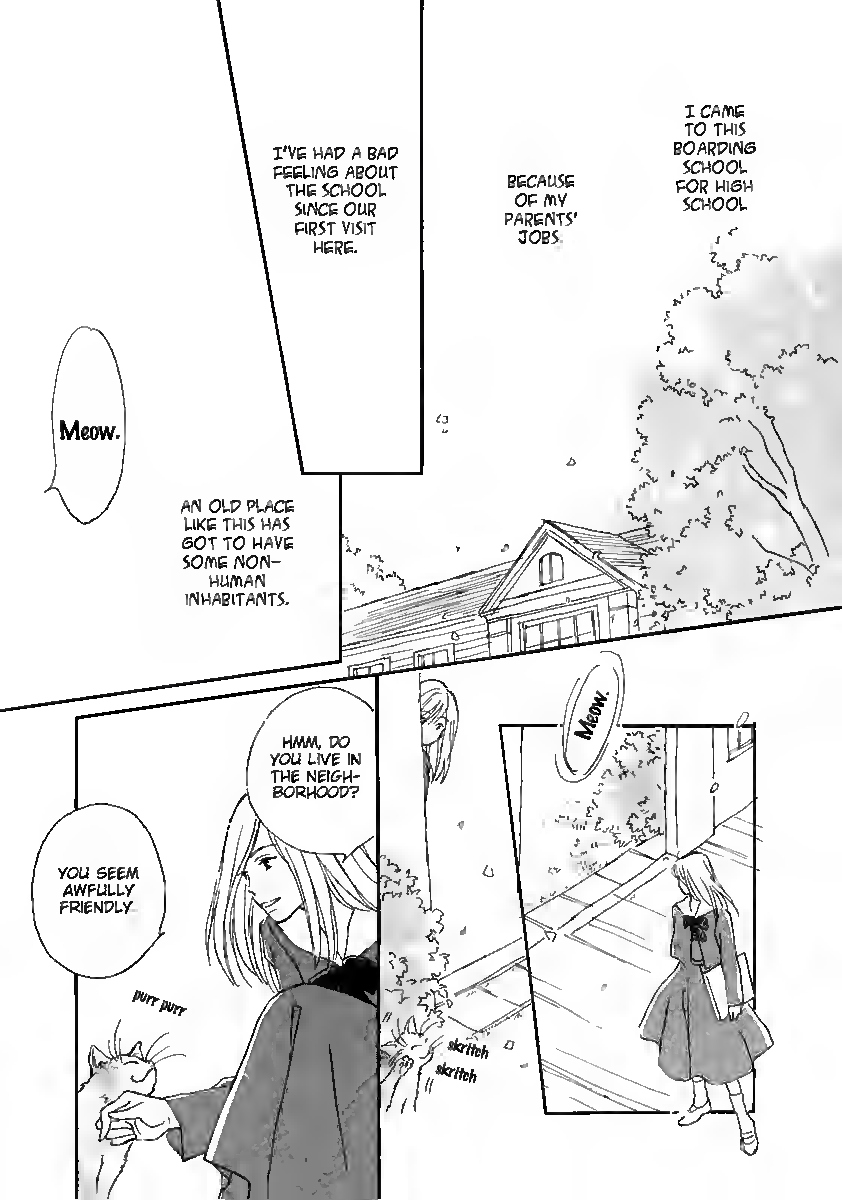
Author's Note:
Paradise (Kasho no Kuni) = A utopia that the Chinese emperor Huang Di (the Yellow Emperor) visited in dreams.
To visit Paradise = To enjoy a pleasant nap.


HAVE YOU JOINED A CLUB YET?
NO.
I'M NOT ATHLETIC.
I BET ALL THE SPORTS TEAMS ARE DYING TO HAVE YOU, SINCE YOU'RE SO TALL.
YOU'RE KIDDING!
You're a fast runner
flutter
Hmm?
WHOOSH


...A CHERRY TREE?
WHY
Smack dab in the middle of the hallway!
HASN'T ANYONE ELSE NOTICED?
SA-EKI-SAN!
Gurk


YOU CAN SEE IT, CAN'T YOU? ♡
I KNEW
YOU HAD POTENTIAL!
NOT HER AGAIN.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT...
OH, STILL PLAYING DUMB?
DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT THAT REALLY IS?
It's called the Spirit Finger!
blurt
NO.
I'VE TOLD YOU A HUNDRED TIMES,
I DON'T WANT TO JOIN THE STRANGE STORIES CLUB.

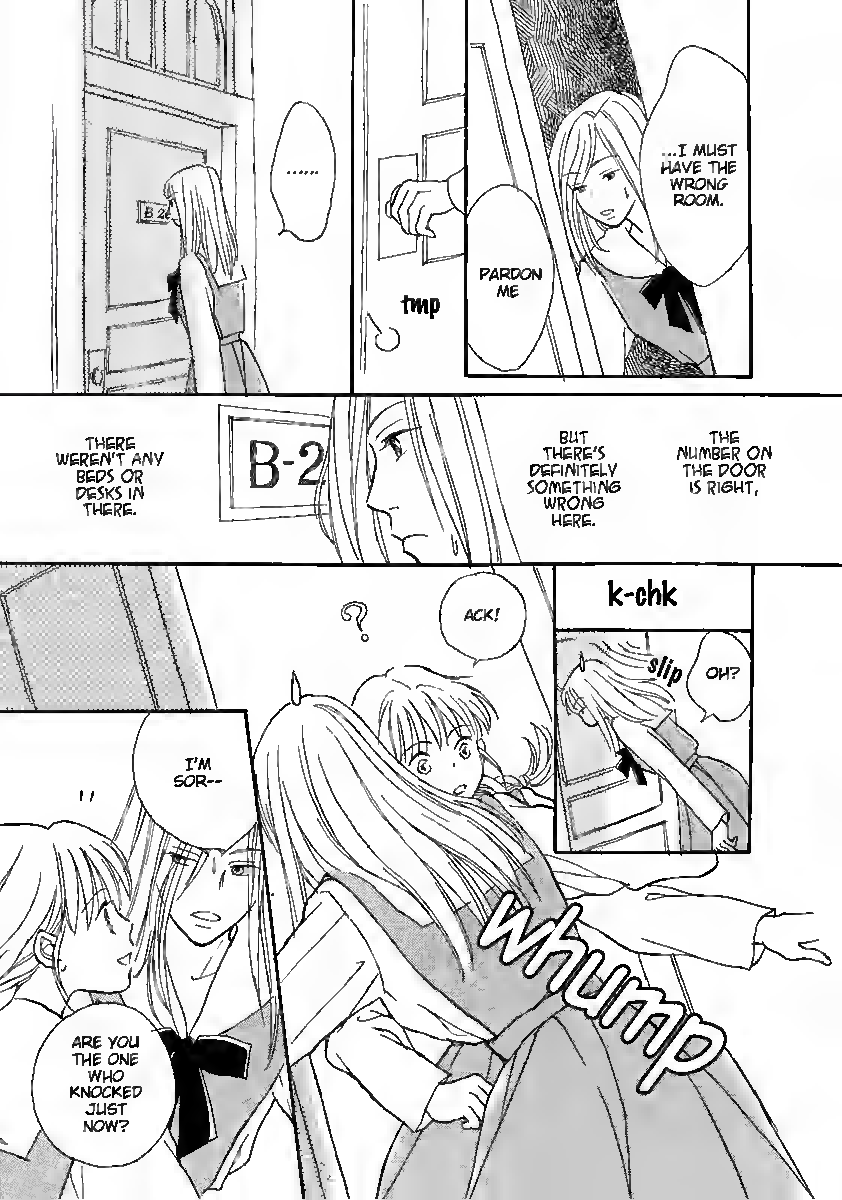

EXCUSE ME
Oh!
WAS THAT AN UPPER-CLASSMAN?
She was beautiful!
IT WAS NOTHING.
I'm not giving up!


I'VE HAD A BAD FEELING ABOUT THE SCHOOL SINCE OUR FIRST VISIT HERE.
BECAUSE OF MY PARENTS' JOBS.
I CAME TO THIS BOARDING SCHOOL FOR HIGH SCHOOL
Meow.
AN OLD PLACE LIKE THIS HAS GOT TO HAVE SOME NON-HUMAN INHABITANTS.
Meow.
HMM, DO YOU LIVE IN THE NEIGH-BORHOOD?
YOU SEEM AWFULLY FRIENDLY.
purr purr
skritch
skritch

HUH? A CAT?! WHERE?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
A STRAY CAT WANDERED IN HERE.
See?
SAEKI-SAN?
..OH, IT ALREADY LEFT.
Mrow
OH, PHEW.
I'm allergic to cats.
.....
OH, KAMPYO?
LONG TIME NO SEE!
Meow
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?

C'MON, YOU GOTTA LET ME SEE YOUR FACE ONCE IN A WHILE.
tug
Mrowr!
WHO'S THAT?
HEY, DO YOU LIVE IN B DORM?
IF YOU'RE HEADED BACK THERE,
COULD YOU DO ME A LITTLE FAVOR?

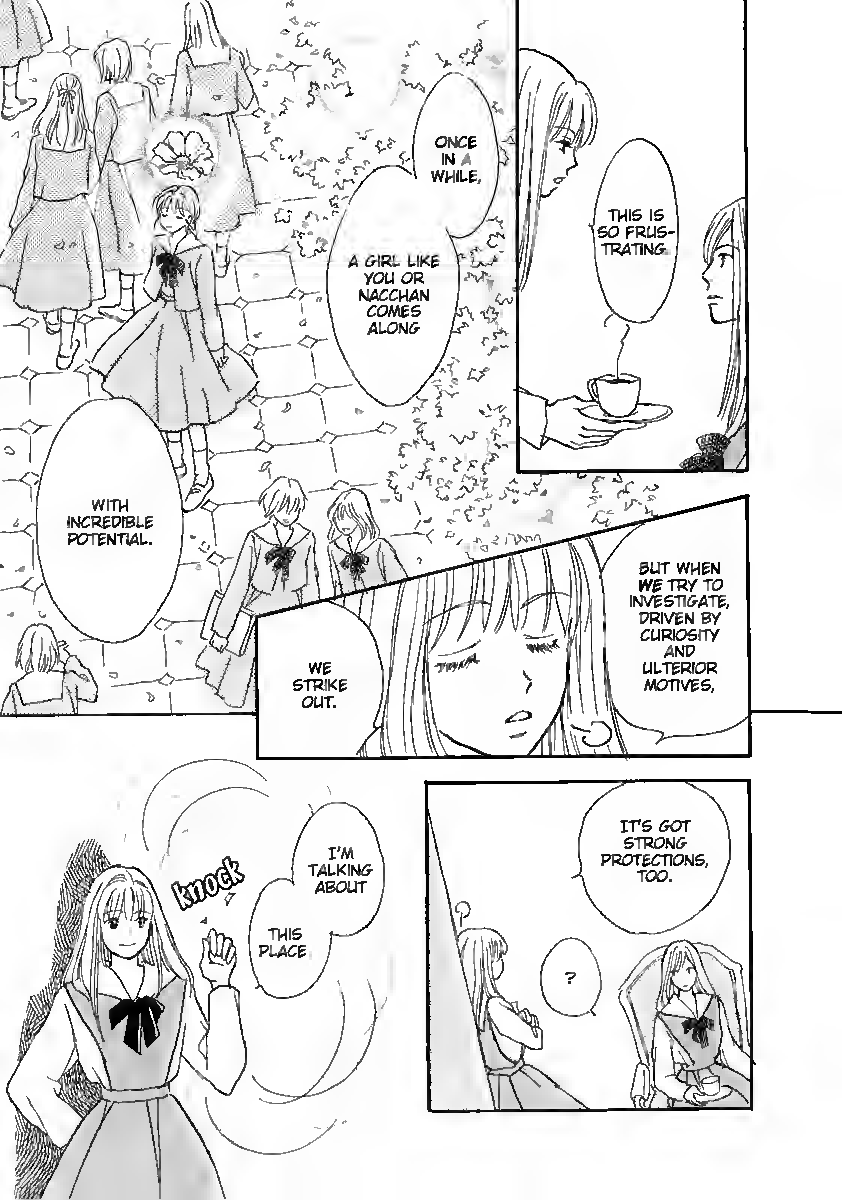
COME IN!
knock knock
k-chk
EXCUSE ME. I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR KAZAMA-SA--

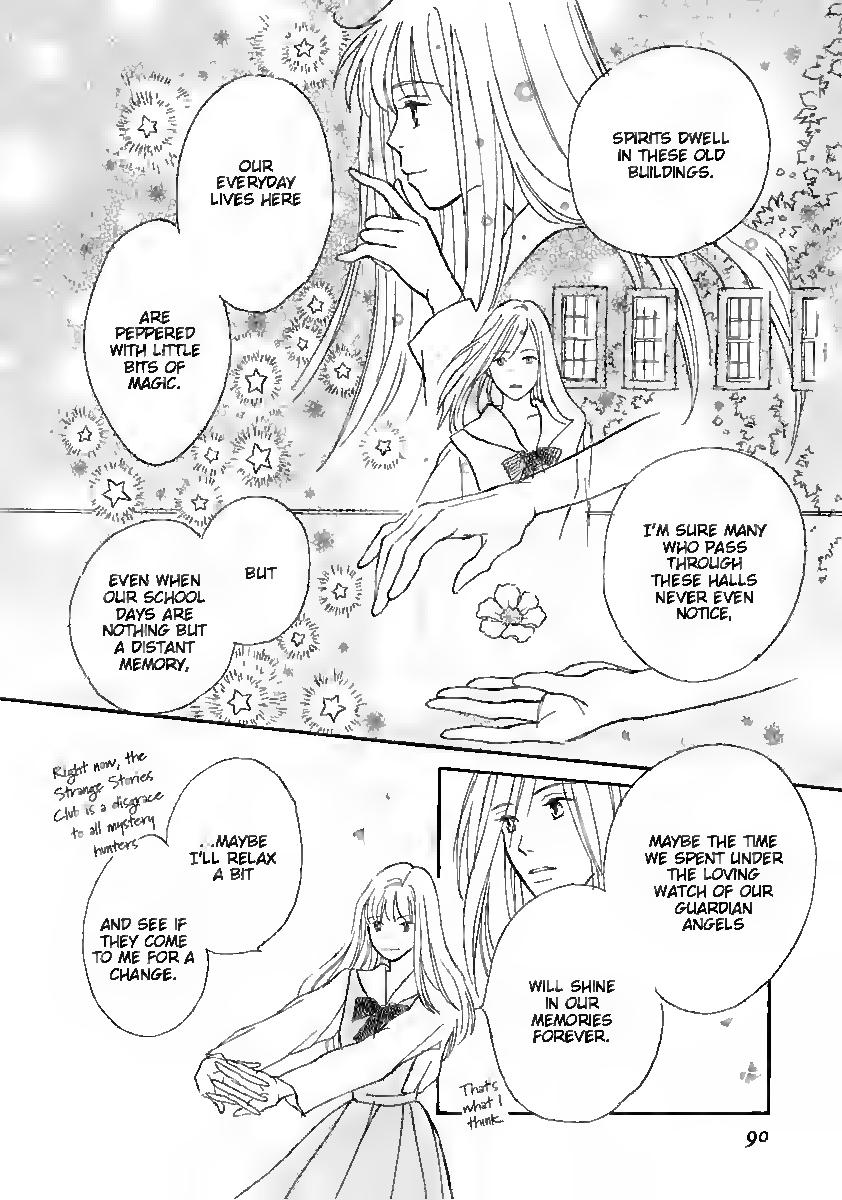

B 2
.....
tmp
PARDON ME
...I MUST HAVE THE WRONG ROOM.
B-2
THERE WEREN'T ANY BEDS OR DESKS IN THERE.
BUT THERE'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING WRONG HERE.
THE NUMBER ON THE DOOR IS RIGHT,
k-chk
slip
OH?
ACK!
?
I'M SOR--
!!
Whump
ARE YOU THE ONE WHO KNOCKED JUST NOW?

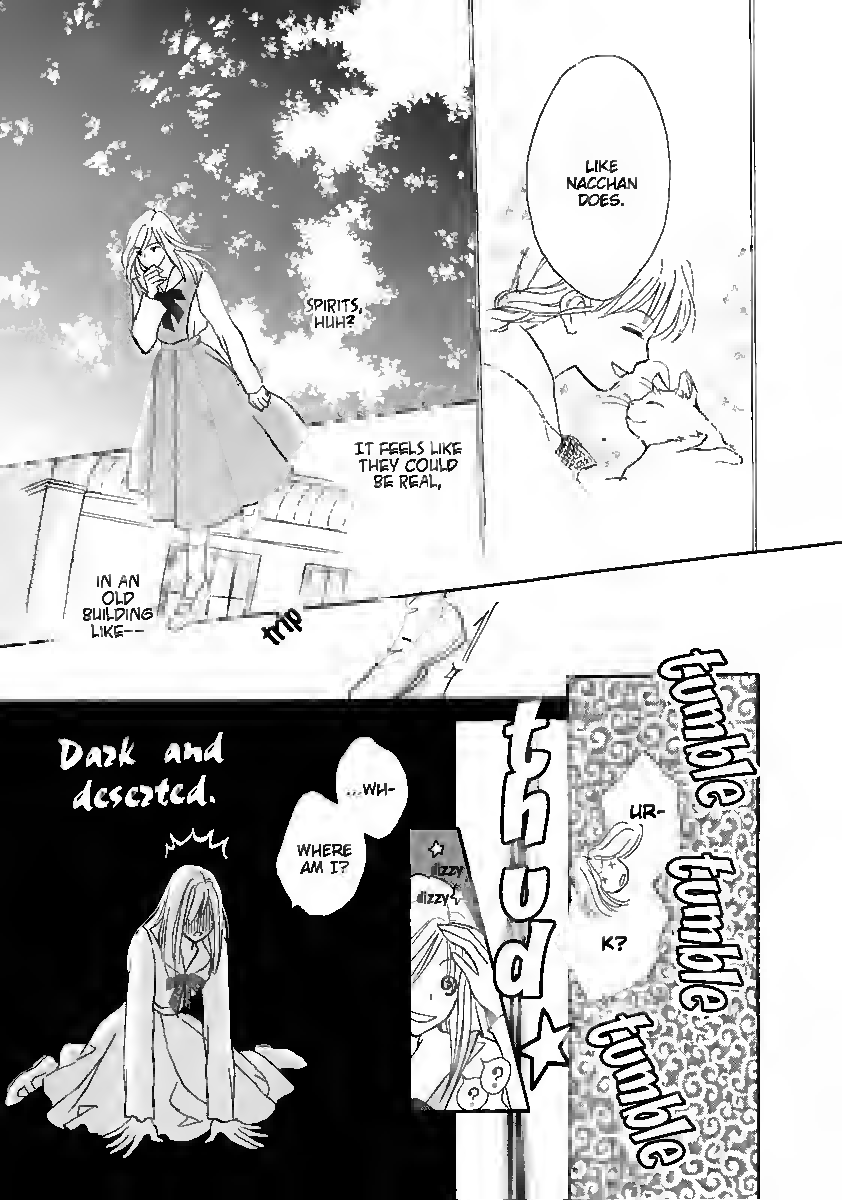
OH!
THAT GIRL. I SAW WITH THE CAT...
SORRY, DID IT STARTLE YOU?
THIS DOOR
SENDS PEOPLE SOMEWHERE ELSE SOMETIMES
..SOMEWHERE ELSE?
Where?
LUM, WHAT DID YOU NEED?
You have a message?
OH, ARE YOU--
I'M KAZAMA.
"WE CAN'T USE MR2 TODAY, SO WE'RE DOING VOCAL EXERCISES IN THE COURTYARD INSTEAD."
And she asked you to hand these out
Thanks!
ARE YOU IN THE DRAMA CLUB?
NO, THE CHORUS
MR2 is Music Room 2
clasp

I'LL JOIN, TOO!
IF I'M GOING TO LIVE IN THIS SKETCHY PLACE, I'M GOING TO NEED A KINDRED SPIRIT.
MY NAME'S SAEKI. I'M A FIRST-YEAR.
It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.
YOU'RE SO TALL
Those guys?
SHE SEEMS LIKE A BETTER BET THAN THOSE GUYS, ANYWAY.
Huh? The chorus?
♪ Do re do re do!
I didn't see that coming.
Thanks.
May I assist you?
WHAT'S WITH THE GIANT OVER THERE?
SHE'S AN UNDER-CLASSMAN FROM THE CHORUS.
Isn't she beautiful?

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D HAVE TO COMPETE FOR YOU WITH NACCHAN.
I CAN JOIN BOTH CLUBS. I DON'T MIND.
I MIND.
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER.
OKAY, I'LL STOP PRESSURING YOU.
SO COME WITH ME JUST THIS ONCE, ALL RIGHT?
WELCOME TO OUR CASTLE.
I'LL MAKE SOME TEA.
HAVE A SEAT WHEREVER YOU'D LIKE.


THIS IS SO FRUSTRATING.
ONCE IN A WHILE,
A GIRL LIKE YOU OR NACCHAN COMES ALONG
WITH INCREDIBLE POTENTIAL.
BUT WHEN WE TRY TO INVESTIGATE, DRIVEN BY CURIOSITY AND ULTERIOR MOTIVES,
WE STRIKE OUT.
IT'S GOT STRONG PROTECTIONS, TOO.
?
I'M TALKING ABOUT
THIS PLACE
knock

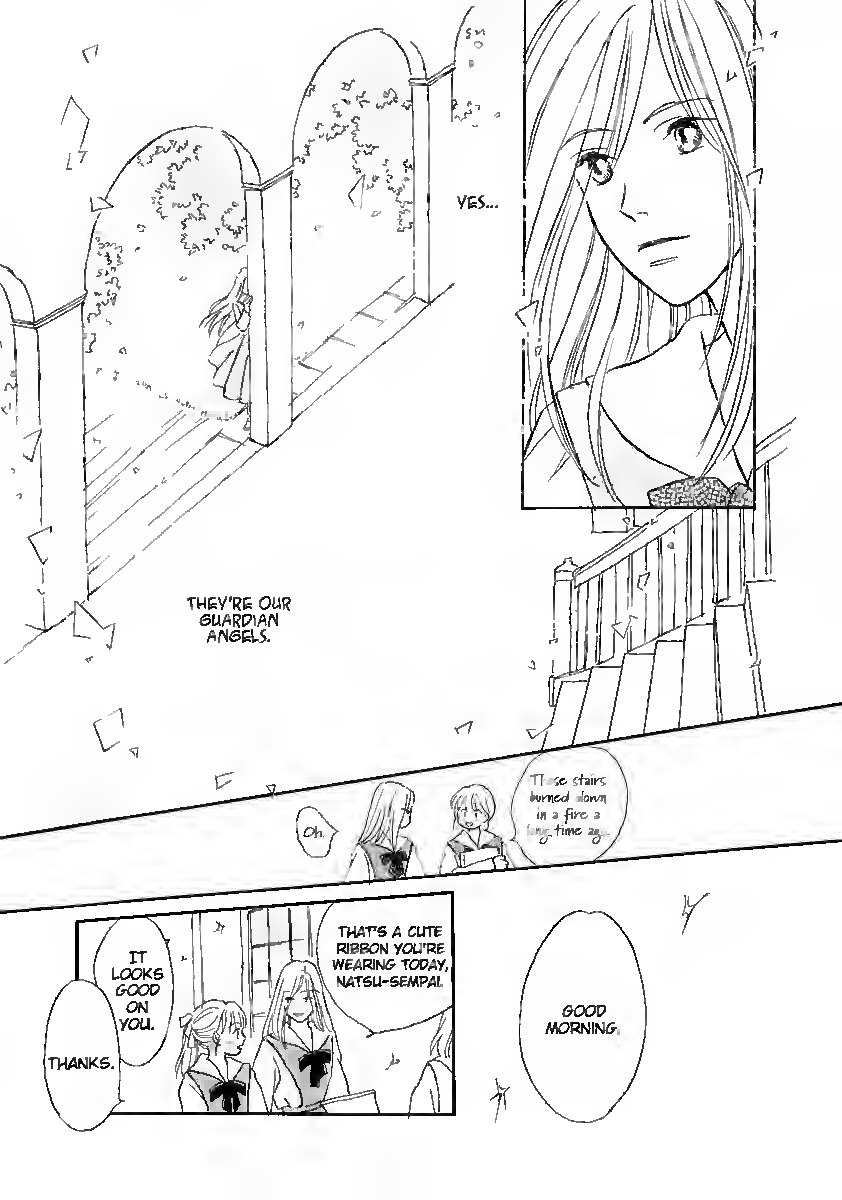

SPIRITS DWELL IN THESE OLD BUILDINGS.
OUR EVERYDAY LIVES HERE
ARE PEPPERED WITH LITTLE BITS OF MAGIC.
I'M SURE MANY WHO PASS THROUGH THESE HALLS NEVER EVEN NOTICE,
BUT
EVEN WHEN OUR SCHOOL DAYS ARE NOTHING BUT A DISTANT MEMORY,
MAYBE THE TIME WE SPENT UNDER THE LOVING WATCH OF OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS
WILL SHINE IN OUR MEMORIES FOREVER.
That's what I think.
Right now, the Strange Stories Club is a disgrace to all mystery hunters.
. . .MAYBE I'LL RELAX A BIT
AND SEE IF THEY COME TO ME FOR A CHANGE.


LIKE NACCHAN DOES.
SPIRITS, HUH?
IT FEELS LIKE THEY COULD BE REAL,
IN AN OLD BUILDING LIKE--
trip
tumble tumble tumble
UR-
K?
thud
dizzy
dizzy
Dark and deserted.
...WH-
WHERE AM I?

I FELL DOWN FROM THERE?
I TRIPPED ON THE STAIRS, TOO.
I THINK I TWISTED MY ANKLE.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
badum
AT LEAST I'M NOT ALONE
Phew
SOUNDS LIKE WE WERE BOTH UNLUCKY.
WELL, LET'S HURRY BACK UP.
CAN YOU STAND?
hop
HUH?
...I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE
IT'S DARK IN HERE,
AND I WAS WORRIED THAT NO ONE WOULD COME AND HELP ME.
IT'S LIKE MY HEART IS RESONATING WITH HERS
hop

eaaak...
cr
THUP
IS YOUR ANKLE OKAY? CAN YOU MAKE IT TO THE INFIR-
MA..
RY..?

NATSU-SEMPAI!
D-DID YOU SEE...?! J-JUST NOW...?!
WHOA
HUH?
And there should only be three flights of stairs
I FELL DOWN THEM ONCE, TOO
.....
Really?
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN SOMEONE COME BACK FROM THE "STAIRS."
I KNOW, RIGHT?
COME TO THINK OF IT...
WERE YOU SCARED?
...NO, NOT AT ALL.


YES...
THEY'RE OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS.
Oh
Those stairs burned down in a fire a long time ago.
GOOD MORNING.
THAT'S A CUTE RIBBON YOU'RE WEARING TODAY, NATSU-SEMPAI.
IT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU.
THANKS.

I PICKED THAT RIBBON FOR HER.
Yeah
OH, IT'S CROOKED.
I'll fix it for you
WELL, AS FOR ME,
Come on, let's go!
Thanks.
I STILL HAVE A LOT OF WEAKNESSES.
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE NOT GOING AWAY ANYTIME SOON.
W-well
They keep doing it
Is that gesture popular with the first-years?
Nyah-nyah!
?
END

Lililicious~may its fragrance encompass you
lililicious@hanmail.net, http://lililicious.net

The Secret Stairs

chapter 18

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